

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge CCP and Wilderness Reviews for Alaska NWRs

Questions and Answers

Q1: What is the purpose of a comprehensive conservation plan?

A1: A comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) is the result of a mandatory planning process that guides stewardship of a national wildlife refuge. Development and revision of CCPs for national wildlife refuges in Alaska are governed by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act.

Q2: Why is the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) revising the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's CCP?

A2: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), an agency with the Department of Interior, has authority to administer national wildlife refuges. ANILCA directs the Secretary of the Interior to “prepare, and, from time to time, revise, a comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge.” Service policy states, “We will revise the CCP every 15 years thereafter or earlier . . .” The existing CCP for Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was signed on 12 September 1988.

Q3: How long will the process take?

A3: The process will take approximately two years. Preplanning was begun in the fall of 2009. The Service will conduct public involvement and scoping in Spring 2010; develop and analyze alternatives in Summer/Fall 2010; and release the draft CCP/EIS in February 2011. Public involvement in any necessary revision of the draft will occur in the summer 2011 and the final CCP will be released in March 2012. An EIS with Record of Decision will be completed by April 30, 2012.

Q4: Who is involved in development of the CCP?

A4: The planning process will begin with public discussions about issues and future goals for stewardship of the Arctic Refuge. The Service will meet the public this spring in Washington DC and the following communities in Alaska: Anchorage, Arctic Village, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Kaktovik, and Venetie. The meetings will help the Service identify issues and draft alternatives for future stewardship of the refuge. After evaluating public comments, the Service will release a draft CCP for public review and comment in February 2011. Based upon a second involvement process and thorough review of comments, the Service will issue a record of decision in April 2012. Additional information about the planning process for Arctic Refuge will soon be posted at <http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.html>.

Q5: Will the CCP make any decision regarding oil development on the Arctic Refuge?

A5: Only Congress has the authority to decide whether or not the refuge's western coastal plain (also called the 1002 Area) should be made available for oil and gas development.

Q6: Will the CCP change hunting and fishing or subsistence rules?

A6: The CCP will not change harvest regulations. Regulations concerning sport harvest of fish and game are governed by the State of Alaska and harvest of subsistence resources are governed by the Federal Subsistence Board.

Q7: How does the CCP affect the public?

A7: The CCP will provide long-range guidance and management direction for the refuge for the next 15 years or until the CCP is revised. Legal mandates and Service policies require public involvement in the planning process. In addition, public engagement will serve to improve the CCP and will lead to public ownership of its provisions.

Q8: Can the Service designate wilderness areas through the CCP revision process?

A8: No. Only Congress can designate wilderness. The Service may forward a wilderness recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior for consideration. If he chooses, the Secretary of the Interior may forward the recommendation to the President who then transmits the proposal to Congress.

Q9: What is the purpose of congressionally-designated wilderness?

A9: The purposes of the Wilderness Act are to: a) secure an enduring resource of wilderness; b) protect and preserve the wilderness character of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System; c) administer the System for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness; and d) gather and disseminate information regarding the use and enjoyment of wilderness areas.

Q10: What is the Service policy for conducting a wilderness review?

A10: The Service had postponed wilderness reviews of Alaska refuges as it awaited finalization of a national wilderness stewardship policy. The policy, completed in November 2008, mandates wilderness reviews for refuges outside of Alaska and provides the option for refuges within Alaska. With the initiation of planning for Arctic Refuge, the Service is announcing that it will evaluate the suitability of areas of Alaska refuges for the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Q11: If the Service recommends wilderness to the Secretary, how does it affect refuge management?

A11: The Service manages recommended wilderness in a way that protects the wilderness character of the area. The legal requirements of the Wilderness Act do not apply until Congress makes a formal designation.

Q12: Is a wild and scenic river review going to be part of the CCP revision process?

A12: The Service will inventory, study and possibly propose additional rivers suitable and/or eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Designation of a Wild and Scenic River requires an Act of Congress.

Q13: Will all of areas of the refuge not currently designated as wilderness, including the 1002 area, be considered in the wilderness review?

A13: The entire refuge will be open to discussion during the public involvement and scoping process, but a decision on whether to include wilderness review of the 1002 area will not be made until after completion of the public scoping process. A decision to conduct such a review of this area would only result in a recommendation to designate or to not designate. Should there be a recommendation to designate, the area could only be designated wilderness through an act of congress.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region, April 6, 2010